

FAMINE AS A FUNCTION OF EMPIRE
IN ARROW OF GOD AND STAR OF THE SEA

BY

C2010

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in English and the
Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts

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Date Defended May 17, 2010

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Abstract

This paper speaks to several broad questions about the relationship between culture and nature as represented in Chinua Achebe's novel *Arrow of God* and Joseph O'Connor's novel *Star of the Sea*: How are the categories nature and culture constructed through colonial and scientific discourses? To what extent do Achebe and O'Connor engage in discourses that frame nature and culture as inextricable categories? What worldviews are inchoate to competing discourses about nature and culture, and how are these worldviews negotiated in the texts? And finally, despite colonialism's difference in kind between Ireland and Nigeria, how do O'Connor and Achebe both present ecological distress as a long term consequence of colonialism? The truly fascinating aspect of pairing these texts together emerges from the observation that O'Connor and Achebe approach their representations of competing worldviews with drastically different motivations in mind. While O'Connor's text clearly calls the British Empire to task for its involvement in the deaths and emigration of millions of Irish people during the Great Famine, Achebe's novel uses a more self-reflective lens. While both novels use famine as a locus for discussing colonialism's wide scale disruptiveness, Achebe's famine is also an accusation in the vein of Davis's graphic images, but it is an accusation against Igbo people rather than empire because famine in *Arrow of God* is represented as the drastic consequence of betraying Igbo ways of life through embracing colonial ones.

Introduction:

Toward the end of the introduction to his book *Late Victorian Holocausts*, Mike Davis provides a disclaimer for his inclusion in the text of graphic images depicting people subject to British imperial policies on famine relief. Davis's disclaimer is not to warn readers that they will soon encounter pictures of emaciated bodies whose sexes and ages are sometimes difficult to determine because each one looks like a skeleton; rather, this disclaimer makes clear that Davis includes the images as an "accusation" against the British Empire, and not an "illustration" of famine's effects (22). For Davis, British famine policies "were often the exact moral equivalent of dropping bombs from 18,000 feet" because they actively sought to eliminate famine victims rather than assist them (22). It is well understood that Britain's economic modernization depended on the underdevelopment of its colonies (Vernon 6-7), and while its colonies experienced numerous devastating famines throughout the nineteenth century, people in Britain itself enjoyed increased calorific intake from the introduction of cheap foods like sugar from outlying colonies (Vernon 4). Yet despite the colonial world's underdevelopment, Britain committed a great deal of time and money to the study of food and famine in India, Ireland, and Africa, so that even while "tens of millions of poor rural people died appallingly" in a manner "that contradicts much of the conventional understanding of the economic history of the nineteenth century" (Davis 8) the infamous Famine Commission established in the 1870s sought ways to counteract the impacts of widespread starvation. The Commission's strident utilitarianism, evidenced by the miniscule Temple Wage, reflected the larger ideological structures of colonialism, particularly the assumption that colonized natives needed punitive measures to curb uncivilized behavior resulting in mass starvation.

Given the role that colonial powers played in the creation and exacerbation of numerous famines across the globe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is surprising that famine has not been as extensively examined as other postcolonial tropes in inventive or interpretive writing in postcolonial literatures. This is not to say that postcolonial literatures monolithically are unconcerned with famine; in reality, many texts use hunger and food as points of reference for discussing the implications of colonialism. Rather, the architecture of famine, which involves everything from agricultural production to the disbursement of food in workhouses to the disposal of dead bodies, can easily fall by the wayside in light of the highly charged, almost apocalyptic rhetoric of famine narratives. Even Davis's historical account of nineteenth century famines engages at times a sensationalist tone that can obscure the slow violence of colonial frameworks which accept things like famines as variables in a large-scale experiment about modernization. Shiv Visvanathan rightly points out that colonialism is not motivated simply by a desire to build capital—it is the rational function of a society guided by the scientific method, and for scholars of development studies, the violence of modernity, conceptualized here as a set of discourses that define progress as a teleological pursuit of global monoculture, “arises not merely from the violence of the state, but from the violence of science seeking to impose its order on society” (Visvanathan 261). The architecture of famine is managerial in nature, but it is also explicitly scientific and modern. In British colonial famine relief systems, for example, the distribution of food and work is closely monitored and tracked so that the truth of famine lies in reports and charts, in the measurable output of material goods expended versus human bodies expended.

For postcolonial literatures that do encounter famine as a function of colonialism, the issue of scientific discourses must be explored, but not simply for the sake of identifying how

those scientific discourses are deployed. One key concern for postcolonial literatures that engage in ecological analysis is how different discourses reflect competing worldviews about nature and culture, and similarly, how culture and nature are constructed through colonial and scientific discourses. The texts I have chosen for this project—*Star of the Sea* by Joseph O'Connor and *Arrow of God* by Chinua Achebe—illustrate a world in which colonialism is a forum for the machinations of a laboratory state, one in which development as a concept and practice is actually large-scale experimentation in how to make modernity happen more efficiently. To put it another way, O'Connor and Achebe show how development's ruse of benevolence is a means of establishing a monocultural civil society through what Visvanathan calls vivisection and social triage. My discussion of the novels will address these concepts more fully, but I want to establish here a few guiding ideas for my analysis. This paper speaks to several broad questions about the relationship between culture and nature as represented in Achebe and O'Connor's texts: How are the categories nature and culture constructed through colonial and scientific discourses? To what extent do Achebe and O'Connor engage in discourses that frame nature and culture as inextricable categories? What worldviews are inchoate to competing discourses about nature and culture, and how are these worldviews negotiated in the texts? And finally, despite colonialism's difference in kind between Ireland and Nigeria, how do O'Connor and Achebe both present ecological distress as a long term consequence of colonialism? The truly fascinating aspect of pairing these texts together emerges from the observation that O'Connor and Achebe approach their representations of competing worldviews with drastically different motivations in mind. While O'Connor's text clearly calls the British Empire to task for its involvement in the deaths and emigration of millions of Irish people during the Great Famine, Achebe's novel uses a more self-reflective lens. While both novels use famine as a locus for

discussing colonialism's wide scale disruptiveness, Achebe's famine is also an accusation in the vein of Davis's graphic images, but it is an accusation against Igbo people rather than empire because famine in *Arrow of God* is represented as the drastic consequence of betraying Igbo epistemologies through embracing colonial ones.

1. Scientific Discourses and the Violence of Development

In the introduction to *Hungry Words, Images of Famine in the Irish Canon*, George Cusack argues that literature regarding famine in Ireland faces a great definitional dilemma. Scholars interrogating what we have come to call the Great Famine must negotiate the "epistemic challenge" of determining the parameters from which we view this economic, ecological, and cultural disaster. "To look at the body of writing about the Famine," Cusack explains, "is to see attempt after attempt to find the proper historical, political, mathematical, social or literary lens through which the thing itself will finally come into focus" (2). While recent scholarship on the famine in Ireland from 1845 to 1848 suggests that we are searching for a way to make sense of the tragedy, the fact remains that many people, from eye witnesses to the most contemporary academics, repeatedly argue that the famine cannot be represented and thus cannot be made to make sense. For Terry Eagleton, the famine "stirred some to angry rhetoric" but "traumatized others into muteness" to the degree that the famine "strains at the limits of the articulable, and is truly in this sense the Irish Auschwitz" (13). Attempts to narrativize the Great Famine can only speak around it or offer a fragmented trace of cause and effect. Eagleton makes this argument in the context of the Gaelic Revival where the "politics of form" necessitated a move away from Romantic or representational writing about the environment and toward a kind of "native humanism," which, in Yeats' words "[casts] out descriptions of nature for the sake of

nature” (qtd. in Eagleton 5). The question for Yeats is not simply how one should represent Ireland’s landscape, but also what those choices about form signify regarding the ideological structures guiding one’s perspective. In this case, Yeats’ criticism of “nature for the sake of nature” attacks the Romantic view that nature is an aesthetic object to be observed for its inspiring beauty because this perspective tends to efface the social relations that form Ireland’s substantially agricultural landscapes.

Writing that takes “nature for the sake of nature” gestures towards the larger ideological structures guiding British political and cultural imperialism in Ireland where land is “visibly a question of social relations” (Eagleton 7). Exclusively casting nature as object divorces the natural from the social such that it becomes impossible to account for how the land is at once a political, cultural, and ethical category. This is particularly problematic when discussing writing about the Great Famine because famine is not generally a matter of ecological crisis in and of itself, since famine “is not the characteristic of there not *being* enough food to eat,” rather, it is the characteristic of “some people not *having* enough food to eat” because they cannot exchange their economic or cultural capital for enough calories to sustain life (Sen 1). More recently, Michael Watts has explained that famine is an “enormously complex social and biological phenomena” tied to the “command over food” and “power and politics broadly understood” (44). To comprehend famines, Watts argues, one needs a sophisticated understanding of how power functions in systems of property rights, but Watts sees that famine studies unfortunately have yet to really engage with questions of power. Perhaps this is because many studies of famine privilege scientific discourse and realist methodologies over phenomenological accounts since “famines are seen as technical problems that modern social and natural science will eventually solve” instead of strings embedded in a larger ecological matrix (Edkins xv). This is as true now

as it was in the nineteenth century when Charles Trevelyan and his associates in charge of implementing programs to combat food crisis oversaw the development of workhouses and emigration schemes based on scientific research about the minimum amount of calories humans need to sustain life.

Many scholars have addressed the prevalence of scientific discourse in nineteenth century British writing, but I am interested in the ways this discourse is recapitulated in contemporary Irish literature as a contrapuntal force. Despite Eagleton's observation that the famine is conspicuously absent from Joyce and Yeats, there is a long history of inventive writing about the Great Famine from William Carleton's *The Black Prophet* (1846) and Anthony Trollope's *Castle Richmond* (1860), to *The Escape From Home: Beyond the Western Sea Book 1* (1997) by revered young adult novelist Avi. Joseph O'Connor's novel *Star of the Sea* (2002) is a recent addition to famine literature, and it is notable for its multivalent engagement with the Irish famine. O'Connor frames his story about the transatlantic journey of an Irish coffin ship with a text composed by Grantley Dixon, an American journalist traveling from Ireland to New York after reporting on the Famine for an American newspaper. Dixon pieces together *Prologue from An American Abroad: Notes of London and Ireland in 1847* from several different genres—he includes newspaper reports, personal letters, biography and autobiography, poetry, and fiction, among others. In effect, *Star of the Sea* imitates a high-Victorian novel, one that actively historicizes its subject while questioning the very process of historicizing (Tynan 79). Through his fragmented approach to articulating the famine, O'Connor demonstrates that the tragedy which so deeply affected both Irish and English people is something that cannot be explained by charts, maps, and dietetic studies alone. *Star of the Sea's* form, which mocks the notion that more evidence of the famine is better evidence of the famine, ironically disposes with the kinds

of scientific discourse that frame most studies of the Great Famine and instead advances a humanistic historiography that accounts for the relationship between the natural and the social in the context of the Irish famine.

I have called *Star of the Sea* a multivalent text because its form engages with several different genres of writing that speak to many kinds of truths about the Great Famine. While O'Connor is the author of the novel *Star of the Sea*, the text is positioned as a story composed by Grantley Dixon. Passages written in journalistic forms testify to a verifiable, reportable truth about communal experiences and political reactions to famine while passages written as personal letters between characters highlight the individual's experience of poverty and starvation. Likewise, passages that are part of court records retain the sense of an official, government sanctioned narrative about the murder that concerns Dixon's text, while an abstract poem in the shape of a ship and preceded by a mostly blank page emphasizes the desperate plea, "*Ora pro nobis*": pray for us (O'Connor 265). *Star of the Sea* is multivalent because of its form, but the stories O'Connor tells with the text also point to a constellation of experiences—the text is at once a travelogue and a murder mystery, a romance and a tragedy. It looks at the entire scope of emotional life for these characters fleeing starvation and death.

Dixon's own emotional resonance and the story of his progression from sympathetic reporter to executioner hides behind his account of Pius Mulvey, a man whose descent into personal hell seems to mirror Ireland's disintegration. What is important about this observation is not simply that Dixon hides the truth about David Merridith's murderer until the end of the text; because O'Connor frames *Star of the Sea* as Dixon's text, the meaning of *An American Abroad* is always overlaid with *Star of the Sea*'s ironic awareness. Whatever Dixon composes is always already O'Connor's commentary about Dixon's composition, so when it becomes clear

that Dixon's purpose in composing his text is not just to tell the story of this coffin ship, but to ostentatiously point a finger at Mulvey, O'Connor is highlighting how obviously Dixon participates in the creation of a mythology about the "Monster of Newgate," which is also a meta-commentary about how narratives get produced in the first place. Thus *Star of the Sea* is also multivalent because Dixon's personal story is layered on top of his creation of Mulvey's story—the more he builds up Mulvey as the murderer of an important first-class passenger on the eponymous ship, the more he reveals the process by which communally accepted stories—narratives about history—are made.

Footnotes throughout *Star of the Sea* gesture toward this historicizing process and also demonstrate how Dixon participates in a scientific discourse. Inserting footnotes into his text enables Dixon to posit the truthfulness of his story; they reinforce the veracity of his oftentimes melodramatic tale by pointing toward the location and nature of Dixon's sources—one footnote contextualizes a court document in which Mary Duane, a servant to Merridith's family, denounces Pius Mulvey, the man assumed by the public to have murdered Merridith onboard the *Star of the Sea* (O'Connor 266). The issue at hand is not how Dixon found the document, but how the footnote functions in the text. This particular example shows Dixon's insistence on the historical traces of his story; he knows that the story is not true, that Pius Mulvey did not kill David Merridith, but the evidence that exists in the public record supports the truth he constructs in *An American Abroad*. The act of using footnotes establishes the truth of Dixon's story even if the footnotes themselves are irrelevant to what is being told. In another footnote, Dixon discusses the color of the sails on the ship that transported Daniel O'Connell's body to his home after his death in Genoa; the *Star of the Sea* passes this ship early in the voyage, and many passengers weep as it goes by because "seeing the ship was like seeing the man" (O'Connor xvi).

Dixon's footnote reads, "In my memory the sails on the ship were black, but when I consult my notes I see I am mistaken" (O'Connor xvi). Again, the issue is not whether the ship's sails are actually black but why this footnote exists. This footnote is evidence that Dixon's text operates in the realm of a rational epistemology—the precision of fact outweighs the reality of experience. Even though Dixon's words are not always direct reflections of scientific discourses, his epistemological lens is enframed by scientific discourses. However, O'Connor disrupts these discourse because for him the footnotes are an ironic doubling that mock the very idea of establishing a "true" version of the traumatic events since the footnotes are ultimately meant to misdirect the reader by supporting a version of events that proves Mulvey is the murderer rather than Dixon.

The form of *Star of the Sea* further demonstrates a multivalent construction through the epigraphs that O'Connor introduces before settling in to Dixon's text. The four quotations represent radically different notions of the famine's causes and effects, which in turn illustrate several epistemological positions. For example, O'Connor juxtaposes the racist rhetoric of Charles Trevelyan with the nationalistic ethos of James Connolly; Trevelyan's claim that the Irish were being punished by God for being "an idle, ungrateful and rebellious country; an indolent and un-self-reliant people" is a counterpoint to the fury of Connolly's proclamation that "Providence sent the potato blight but England made the Famine" (O'Connor vii). Trevelyan's comment encompasses a resentful colonial perspective that sees Ireland as evidence of a failed experiment in modernity; according to this perspective, the naturally lazy Irish people are the architects of their own crisis. At the same time, Connolly draws attention to the way that the design of this experiment in modernity—particularly the Ascendency and the Plantation of Ulster, but also the Irish Poor Act imposed after the Great Famine—raced toward failure on its

own. O'Connor's series of epigraphs also includes a quotation from *Punch* magazine explaining how Irish people are barbaric animals:

The Missing Link: A creature manifestly between the gorilla and the Negro is to be met with in some of the lowest districts of London and Liverpool by adventurous explorers. It comes from Ireland, when it has contrived to migrate; it belongs in fact to a tribe of Irish savages: the lowest species of Irish Yahoo. When conversing with its kind it talks a sort of gibberish. It is, moreover, a climbing animal, and may sometimes be seen ascending a ladder laden with a hod of bricks. (vii)

According to the perspective represented in *Punch*, Irish people constitute the link between the gorilla and the Negro—they are “Yahoos,” a reference to the deformed and savage humanoid creatures enslaved by the Houyhnhnms of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. This dehumanizing rhetoric positions Irish people somewhere between nature and culture, but this is not a hybrid state, it is a state of liminality. They are neither fully human because they are “climbing animals,” nor fully animal because they are “tribal.” Irish people are, however, observable and classifiable; the poorest of the poor, the emigrants and the exiled, are a different species than even those left behind in Ireland. This is an example of the “modern gaze” that “brings the primitive and the archaic back into contemporaneity” in the name of progress (Visvanathan 263). Though Connolly's understanding of the famine certainly anticipates the contemporary perspectives offered by Sen, Davis, and Edkins, the comments from Trevelyan and *Punch* magazine reflect the racist beliefs enfolded by scientific discourses that turned Ireland into a laboratory for modernity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

While the novel's form both gestures toward and deconstructs the scientific epistemologies that frame English colonialism in Ireland especially in the nineteenth century, the text at large engages with these epistemologies in more subtle ways. It is surprising, for example, that there is little mention of the workhouses designed for famine relief given that these are a locus of the vivisectional mandate "where the other becomes the object of experiment which in essence is violence and in which pain is inflicted in the name of science" (Visvanathan 259). According to David Nally, the workhouses were places where "an elaborate matrix of spatial techniques" were implemented "to mark and individuate inmates while institutionalizing the doctrine of the 'workhouse test'" (726). Nally calls individuals forced into workhouses inmates, and this designation is appropriate not because the people in workhouses were criminals, but because the purpose of the workhouse mirrored the purpose of the overarching penal system at the time. People admitted to the workhouses faced extensive classification and observation in addition to highly-restrictive rules and punishments for breaking those rules. Inmates were fed the minimum amount of food necessary for them to subsist, though in Ireland the distribution was not as extreme as in India where the Temple Wage provided less food than the diets implemented at Buchenwald (Davis 38). Nevertheless, the difficult work included "stone breaking, corn milling, oakum piercing, pipe laying, and digging" for men and "sewing, knitting, carding, washing, scrubbing, mending and tending the sick" for women (Nally 727). British parliament papers indicate that the purpose of the workhouses was "to restore, or create, the feeling of self-confidence—to revive or establish, the habit of reliance" (qtd. in Nally 727), but the strict adherence to policy and procedure made the workhouses more punitive than restorative (McLoughlin 722).

Taken with other scholarship on the famine from people like Eagleton and Edkins, the absence of the workhouses suggests that they are places of unspeakable horror, though the violence of the workhouses derives not only from the physical toll of manual labor and the lack of sufficient food for famine victims, but also from the fact that the workhouses “encode a structure of domination” between hungry Irish people and non-hungry English people, and from the fact that they “reside in the banality of their everydayness,” which is to say the violence of the workhouses is systemic rather than radical (Visvanathan 258). Workhouses in the Great Famine context constitute a colonial idea of development; they were the Benthamite project writ large, a form of social triage tantamount to genocide because they allowed for the “rational imposition of death on those regarded as refractory to the scientific gaze” (Visvanathan 273). Triage as a concept and practice applies in the case of development because development projects always involve a process of deciding whom to save. Decision-calculus in these situations demands a rational look at the costs of each option, and forces one to ask “Who is worth saving?” That workhouses are absent from O’Connor’s text suggests that we must look more for examples of the development project in places where the violence is so systemic as to be almost entirely obscured.

The ship itself might be taken as a stand in for the violence of the workhouses; the imagery associated with the ship, the whole gangrenous mess, demonstrates the effect of Britain’s laboratory of modernity in a highly visceral way. One can imagine the acrid stench of “rotten food, rotten flesh, rotten fruit of rotting bowels” overpowering the senses as “the malicious feter oozed its way around steerage” and eventually into the first-class cabin like an infection (O’Connor xv). Coffin ships in general were part and parcel of plans to consolidate landholdings in Ireland during the famine years; powerful landlords bought out small holders as

more and more tenant farmers were evicted or volunteered to leave estates and sail to the United States or Canada, which made emigration essentially an experimental solution to the famine. Consolidation, it was thought, would prevent over-farming of the land which was seen as both an agricultural problem and a cultural one, since the British perceived that the land was only over-farmed because there were too many Catholic peasant families trying to feed too many people from tiny plots.

On *Star of the Sea* then, there is a clearly encoded hierarchy of passengers—those who have paid for their voyage and those whose voyage was paid for by someone else. This hierarchy corresponds, obviously, to the designation of first-class or steerage passenger, and the violence of this hierarchy plays out in the disbursement of food and services to the passengers depending on which classification applies. First-class passengers are the recipients of several large meals served at consistent times every day while the steerage passengers must be content with minimal slop. The first-class passengers are allowed to be wasteful, and until late in the voyage when the ship starts to run short of food for the steerage passengers, the first-class leftovers are fed to the pigs instead of the people. The structural violence is so banal that though the ship's captain ardently records in his log the names of passengers who have died in voyage, the horror of so many deaths on board does not seem to affect him until midway through the voyage when he finally writes, "This dreadful day fourteen steerage passengers died, making a total of thirty-six since commenced this voyage, and were buried according to the rite of the sea" (O'Connor 77). It is only a moment of crisis that brings the violence of the ship's project, the reason for its existence, into the captain's consciousness.

My intent here is not to suggest that Captain Lockwood lacks sympathy for the steerage passengers, because he spends a great deal of the voyage trying to find ways to accommodate the

steerage passengers with some dignity, and at one point he scolds the ship's crew, explaining in the log that "Instructions have been issued for the men to desist from referring to the steerage passengers as 'steeries', 'steeragers', 'raggers', 'shawlies', & cetera" since "These terms are employed not only to disparage certain passengers that were better assisted with kindness, but are used among the men themselves as varieties of insult" (O'Connor 33). But Lockwood is complicit with the rational epistemology that guides such a development project and the scientifically justified racism that motivates its harshest violence—his practice of recording in the log mirrors the process of administering the workhouses, though to a much lesser extent, and he believes in a version of racial determinism. In one conversation with Mulvey, Lockwood learns about the Irish descendents of a Spanish armada ship wrecked on the coast of Galway, and though doubtful that the Spanish would intermarry with the Irish, he writes, "Nevertheless it is conspicuous that a portion of those in steerage do indeed have the dusky features of the Iberian people and in their mode of thinking are as remote from our own English race as the Hottentot, Watutsi, Mohammedan, or Chinee (O'Connor 81). Lockwood's tone here suggests an easy curiosity about the Irish passengers on his ship, but it also reveals much about his perception of their modes of thinking—it is race rather than religion or culture at large that characterizes the difference between self and other for Lockwood.

The emergence of discourses that speak to a scientific rationality enframing a colonial development project are further present in regard to David Merridith, a first class passenger on the *Star of the Sea* and a member of the landed gentry in Ireland. O'Connor initially represents Merridith in a sympathetic light, illustrating how his childhood was fraught from constant travelling between his home in Galway and his boarding school in England. Merridith's sense of self emerges from these two worlds—he is a son of Ireland and England, but feels more

connected to Galway. When he is home, Merridith wears “the peasants canvas britches” because “he seemed to think they concealed his status” (O’Connor 62). Merridith’s sense of personal authenticity is connected to his appearance and his decision to speak Irish at home, but the further removed he is from the Connemara, the less important this sense of Irish identity becomes. His coming of age involves the realization that he must accept the responsibility of managing the estate left to him by his late father—he becomes an adult when he accepts the mantle of being a landlord.

Merridith’s relationship to this title and position is fraught, however, because he is somewhat uncomfortable with the idea of such authority and because he seems to possess a genuine affection for his tenants. Merridith’s mother, Verity, offers a legacy of fair treatment for Merridith to model in his own position as landlord—during the famine of 1751, Lady Verity died after tending to tenants with famine fever. The very old tenants say “that she must have inhaled the breath of someone suffering from blight fever, or looked too directly into his eyes” (O’Connor 55). Though Merridith holds an English title and is fundamentally an absentee landlord, it seems that his affection toward his tenants is lessened only by a matrix of problems that the famine has caused. As he explains to Dixon at a dinner on the ship, “Not a man on my estate has paid rent for four years. My father’s death leaves me with half of all the bogland in southern Connemara, a great deal of stones and bad turf, a greater deal of overdue accounts and unpaid wages. Not to mention the considerable duties owing to the government” (O’Connor 8). Merridith has no desire to be a cruel landlord and is motivated more by the example of his late mother, revered by tenants for her kindness and sacrifice, than the example of his father who admittedly “been an inflexible landlord, in the later years especially” (O’Connor 11). Certainly Merridith is aware that the tenants he oversees feel less than affectionate toward him; he rides

out with a bodyguard to protect himself when it becomes apparent that tenants across Connemara are revolting by murdering their landlords. But the only real sense that Merridith sees his tenants as lesser people is his admission that he generally feigns interest in the “customs of the indigenous” (O’Connor 11). When Dixon accuses Merridith of abusing his tenants and evicting them from the land to “rid it of the weakest and keep the best”, Merridith insists that no one was ever thrown off against his will because “if you treat a man like a savage...he’ll behave like one” (O’Connor 12).

Since Merridith is an English landlord, his constructive view of human identity is both surprising and complicated. It is surprising because his perspective about how to treat Irish tenants certainly stands in opposition to the perspective of people like Trevelyan who saw the Irish as naturally inferior beings because of their language, religion, and ethnic background. Despite raising the rent on his lands by one third and then one half in the course of less than six months in the year before the characters set sail, Merridith is the kind of landlord to provide assistance to his tenants for emigration. He is reminiscent of the actual historical figure Lord Palmerston, a landlord in Ireland whose estate has been extensively researched by Desmond Norton. Norton’s exploration of Palmerston’s landlord practices reveals that Palmerston personally chartered several ships to transport his tenants from Ireland to Canada and was well known for treating his tenants with dignity (163). Merridith’s response to the growing crisis is not extensive as Palmerston’s, primarily because his own estate has dwindled due to an economic downturn and his own philandering with drugs and prostitutes, but Merridith does assist his tenants with Star of the Sea fare, and he counters Dixon’s arguments by pointing out that he has done much to alleviate workhouse conditions. “I have lobbied,” he explains, “to relax the conditions for admission” (O’Connor 14). However, Merridith’s sympathetic view of

his tenants is not enough to sway Dixon who tells Merridith, “You keep your tenants in abject penury, or near it. Break their backs with work to pay for your position, then put them off the land with no compensation when it suits you” (O’Connor 13). Dixon’s speech highlights Merridith’s complacency with his position of power; even though Merridith does not actively endorse the discourse of scientific racism, his privilege depends on the application of the ideology behind the discourse. The fact remains that Merridith’s work in the area of workhouse reform derives mostly from a sense of reluctant obligation; it is the same feeling that motivates Merridith to invite Pius Mulvey to a birthday party for one of Merridith’s sons after Mulvey reports to Merridith that the family is in grave danger from a murderer who want to kills him. Ultimately, Merridith’s constructive view of Irish identity is fraught because of this sense of obligation; he does not want to appear conservative or backward, but resentment toward the tenants frequently bubbles into his consciousness.

Aside from his singular mention of workhouses, though, the concept appears one other time in the text when Merridith remembers the day he returned to Galway after living in England, estranged from his family. He encounters a local farmer who used to live on his father’s land, and Merridith asks where he can find the graves of Mr. and Mrs. Duane, tenants who cared deeply for Merridith in his youth. Merridith asks the man, “I wonder—would it be possible to visit Mr and Mrs Duane’s grave. Just to pay one’s respects” and the man replies, “Their grave—it isn’t known sir. They died in the Galway workhouse” (O’Connor 246). The chapter ends abruptly with this sentence, which mirrors the shock Merridith feels. The discovery that the Duanes died piles on top of the news that his father has died as well, and in the next chapter Merridith copes with these stressors by contemplating projects to help the people remaining on his land:

He would build a new pier and a moorings for the fisherman, perhaps a model school for the smallholder's children. Get in a proper estate manager to help the tenants; some local man, a young man, who was clever and decent. Maybe send him to the Agricultural College in Scotland. Teach the people about soil and hygiene. Give them the benefit of modern ideas. Encourage them to widen their old-fashioned thinking, to change their outmoded customs and unwise ways. This reliance on the 'lumper' or 'horse-potato', for example, when it was clearly so prone to infestation by blight—that could all stop now. (O'Connor 247)

For Merridith, these actions are improvements to the land and the community, but in reality they are a ruse of colonial benevolence, an expression of the upstanding Englishman's burden to civilize the barbaric and expand the political and cultural reaches of empire. Cultural imperialism characterizes Merridith's desires to change the people living on the Kingscourt lands—this is not just a matter of building a structure or two, but of indoctrinating an entire generation of tenants' children through an English education and transforming the management of the land through an agent who will be trained in what Merridith sees as the best methods of farming.

Merridith's attitude here is one of smug superiority; though he has not lived in the Connemara in years, he believes his knowledge of the land is better than the tenant's because he is aware of the latest technology and techniques. What Merridith's thoughts efface, however, are the material conditions which necessitate the limited food tenants can grow. Thus, despite Merridith's earlier claims of sympathy with his tenants, his means of resolving the food crisis on his land stem from the ideology reflected in modernist discourses that represent famine as something that can be solved by science. Merridith's plan here also demonstrates Edkins's

argument that “practices of aid, like famines themselves, benefit some groups at the same time that they make victims of others” (67). Changes to the land involved in building new structures and training new agents will be to Merridith’s advantage, but there is no forethought here about the consequences of imposing such dramatic changes to the agricultural structure of the region, or the cultural structure for that matter. There is a large difference between Merridith’s plan for what amounts to structural adjustment and the solutions offered by workhouses which offered food for work, but both aid systems derive from the belief that making the poor work within the confines of an approved labor system will also adjust their natural tendency toward laziness.

From this analysis, it is clear that Merridith’s plans are fundamentally an extension of the development project that was famine relief in Ireland during the 1840s. O’Connor includes Merridith’s thoughts about the development of his estate at the moment in which Merridith is actually planning on leaving—he has expended all of his trust fund and a substantial portion of wife’s, and there is nothing left to do but start over in America. Any improvements that Merridith could make to his estate are part of the impulse to force colonized people “either acculturate or disappear” (Visvanathan 280). Disappearance in this case is literal in the sense that the choices tenant farmers must make are acculturate, die, or leave. Irish tenant farmers who resist the development project will likely suffer immensely as they are left behind in modernization’s wake.

The multilayered story that O’Connor composes in *Star of the Sea* offers a criticism of the whole constellation scientific rationality involved in development and colonialism through his multivalent account of this Irish coffin ship. As Jenny Edkins points out, this scientific framework is merely a symptom of modernity and famines are ultimately its product (14). That O’Connor’s novel works against the discourses of science means it also works against an idea of

modernity that privileges consolidation writ large—consolidation of land, but also of cultural identifications. *Star of the Sea* encounters scientific rationality and modernity head on by questioning the very idea of fact, by problematizing the process of historicizing, and offering a humanistic view of the Great Famine, one that embraces individual experience.

2. Epistemological Destruction and Indigenous Culpability

Though a famine marks the outcome of the multifaceted power struggle at the heart of Chinua Achebe's 1964 novel *Arrow of God*, there is minimal scholarship which addresses issues of food, environment, and ecology, perhaps because *Arrow of God* is ultimately about the struggle between two competing epistemologies—one bounded by coloniality and the discourses of scientific rationality, the other by a more spiritual phenomenology. Like its predecessor, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *Arrow of God* ruminates on Igbo cultural identity through representations of the complex social rituals involved in marking hospitality and commemorating the dead, and just as *Things Fall Apart* highlights the way Christianity “had come and led many astray”—“not only the low-born and the outcast but sometimes a worthy man” (Achebe, *Things* 174)—*Arrow of God* seeks to define the means by which Igbo lifeways deteriorated in the face of cultural and political imperialism.

Regarding *Things Fall Apart*, Simon Gikandi argues that the novel played a formative role in the construction of African identities, such that the “production of the novel as well as its reading and (re)reading...came to define who we were, where we were, and as Achebe himself would say where the rain began to beat us” (“Chinua” 4-5). If this is true for *Things Fall Apart*, then the principle of examining “where the rain began to beat” Igbo people is even more applicable for a novel like *Arrow of God*. Achebe's words introduce a controversial question

into the conversation about colonialism and Nigeria: to what extent are Igbo people culpable for the cultural and ecological destruction wrought by colonialism? *Arrow of God* aggressively encounters this question, and its purpose remains to demonstrate with an unforgiving eye the moment when Igbo people began a cultural self-immolation that only enabled British hegemony. While *Star of the Sea* posits that famine is a locus of colonial power, in *Arrow of God* famine functions as an accusation against Igbo people; it is the consequence of betraying Igbo ways of seeing and being, and it gestures toward the long term ecological impacts of abandoning an Igbo way of life.

A sense of political and cultural instability overwhelms *Arrow of God* because forces from within and outside the village of Umuaro have already disrupted the village's political organization and social relations. The novel is set several decades before Nigerian independence during a period of indirect rule in which Captain Winterbottom, the British administrator for the Umuaro-Okperi region, must integrate indigenous political organization into the British administration of Nigeria by choosing a warrant chief from among the Igbo leaders. Ideally the warrant chief is someone who will be loyal to the crown while appealing to Igbo people, but this form of political organization runs counter to the Igbo organization of communitarian rule. While the introduction of this new political formation is disruptive to the Umuaro community, Achebe's representation of the village and its people makes clear that Igbo society is not static; even before Winterbottom's decision to force Ezeulu's involvement in indirect rule, the group of villages to which Umuaro belongs undergoes its own crisis of legitimacy because several village elders are wary of Ezeulu's growing power. Their concern is not unfounded since Ezeulu does often contemplate the conditions of his position and the power is able to wield in the wider community through his yam ritual obligations; however, the unease that the cohort leaders

express has more to do with Ezeulu's relationship with the British administrators and what power that will afford him than any power substantiated by his position as chief priest.

Community leaders like Nwaka want to restructure the community's political organization by giving the power to make the cohort's most important decisions to the chief priest of a different god in a different village. This would be a substantial shift in protocol because the cohort of villages and its gods were formed as part of a collective seeking protection from mercenaries hired by the Abam, another ethnic group "who used to strike in the dead of night, set fire to the houses and carry men, women and children into slavery" (Achebe 15). As part of the community's formation, Igbo elders created a deity to protect them—Ulu—and in a move to defend their new community against divisive tyranny, the elders assigned the priesthood of this god to the weakest of the villages (Olaniyan 23). Moving Ulu's priesthood from Umuaro to a more politically powerful village would disrupt the political balance and disenfranchise the villagers in Umuaro, but Ezeulu's rivals see this act as the only solution to the perceived problem of Ezeulu's growing power.

These details about Umuaro's formation underscore Achebe's perception that Igbo culture is characterized by dynamic continuities rather than static closed eras. Cultural dynamism becomes an important part of what it means to be Igbo in *Arrow of God*, which is especially significant given that the Igbo as an ethnic and cultural group have historically both shaped and been shaped by neighboring groups:

In exchange, studies have shown that the Igbo exported to their neighbors some aspects of religious rituals connected with agriculture, kinship practices, and exercise of oracular authority. Thus, before the European presence, the Igbo area

was not a static cultural scene. It was already experiencing some processes of social change and adaptations while developing its institutions. (Njoku 18)

Before colonization, Igboland was already influenced by the blending of cultural markers from outside ethnic and clan groups, but this did not result in a piecemeal group identity; quite the opposite happened— as early as 1699 there was a group in the Biafra area that referred to itself as Igbo, and historically Igbo people have been “first and foremost loyal to their respective villages” while remaining “very much aware of their shared qualities and identities as Igbo” (Koriah 117). By examining the collapse of internal structures of power in addition to addressing colonialism’s impacts, Achebe marks Umuaro as a dynamic community with complex social relations between interior and exterior groups.

If Igbo culture in general, and the Umuaro community in particular, values a certain degree of cultural flexibility, the concern that Achebe raises in *Arrow of God* seems to be at what point this flexibility becomes problematic. Many of Achebe’s novels address this same problem, but in *Arrow of God* the issue comes to down to a question of competing ways of knowing the world. Blending Igbo spiritual traditions with those of another cultural group’s down the Niger River does not require the kind of disassociation with Igbo ways of thinking that embracing a colonial perspective does. Achebe is not concerned with causality as such in *Arrow of God*; instead, he looks at the matrix of power that enables the novel to open onto a new story about Igbo people. This novel is less obviously about development than *Star of the Sea*, but the novel’s final paragraphs represent a moment in which Igbo people must embrace the imperial development project or perish. *Arrow of God* ends with these words: “The Christian harvest which took place a few days after Obika’s death saw more people than even Goodcountry could have dreamed. In his extremity many a man sent his son with a yam or two to offer to the new

religion and to bring back the promised immunity. Thereafter any yam harvested in his fields was harvested in the name of the son” (230). As more and more villagers fall victim to the famine that arises from Ezeulu’s decision to delay the yam harvest, the Christian church steps in and provides an outlet for Igbo people to ritualize yam agriculture.

Offering yams to the Christian god represents a significant move away from Igbo cosmology since yam rituals are inextricably connected to Igbo spirituality. As chief priest of Ulu, Ezeulu must track lunar movements each night in order to mark the passage of time and determine when the yam harvest and planting seasons begin. This is an immense responsibility because the yams provide the villagers with a large portion of their diets, and “if [Ezeulu] should refuse to name the day there would be no festival [of the New Yam]—no planting and no reaping” (Achebe 3). However, the effect of refusing to name the day of the festival has spiritual consequences in addition to physical consequences. Though Igbo spirituality is predicated on a blending of traditions from several ethnic groups in the Niger River region, each clan of Igbo people generally believes that their local gods, who protect them and are responsible for their well being and existence, reside in nature (Ubah 96). Ulu is not the yams, but he is part of the natural environment, and the yam rituals exist to petition Ulu on the community’s behalf. The famine forces the villagers to accept help from the Christian church which explicitly does not recognize the sacredness of nature. Nature is so commonplace, in fact, that a missionary named John Goodcountry tells the recent Christian converts, “You must be ready to kill the python as the people of the rivers killed the iguana. You address the python as Father. It is nothing but a snake, the snake that deceived our first mother, Eve. If you are afraid to kill it do not count yourself a Christian” (Achebe 47). According to Goodcountry, claiming the python is

sacred is tantamount to rejecting all of Christianity because in this worldview God is not part of nature because God *owns* nature (Achebe 216).

Igbo spirituality is not just a matter of religious practice; it represents an entire way of seeing the world. All events are perceived through this spiritual epistemological lens—when a boulder at a nearby water source threatens to topple to the ground, Ezeulu notices that people will not go near the stream “until the *alusi* who owned the stream and whose name it bore had been placated” (Achebe 7). Ezeulu knows the stream’s *alusi* is angry because of the precarious boulder; his perspective as an Igbo person allows for humans and nature to be interconnected, so the way to restore the balance of the boulder, and thus stream’s ecological balance, is to placate the deity. Christianity and Igbo spirituality cannot exist together since Christianity refuses to account for a cosmology of nature, and by giving their offerings to the Christian church, Igbo people in Umuaro acknowledge a difficult realization—that Ulu failed the community in helping them deal with the food crisis at hand (Nwoga 23). Ulu’s failure to help Umuaro is ultimately one of the catalysts for many villagers to abandon Igbo ways of seeing and living.

The perspective offered by the Christian church might not initially seem connected to the kinds of scientific discourses or rational epistemologies that guide the British laboratory state, but the church’s promise of “protection from the anger of Ulu” and its practice of exchanging food for religious beliefs makes it part and parcel of Britain’s larger development project which included establishing indirect rule in Nigeria. Achebe condenses his discussion of the British justification for colonialism as development into a large quotation from the book *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* by George Allen, the colonial administrator in *Things Fall Apart*. Allen’s enthralled description of colonialism advances the sense of divine purpose in civilizing barbaric Africans:

For those seeking but a comfortable living and a quiet occupation Nigeria is closed and will be closed until the earth has lost some of its deadly fertility and until the people live under something like sanitary conditions. But those in search of a strenuous life, for those who can deal with men as others deal with material, who can grasp great situations, coax events, shape destinies and ride on the crest of the wave of time Nigeria is holding out her hands... The British race will take its place, the British blood will tell. Son after son will leave the Mersey, strong in the will of his parents today, stronger in the deed of his fathers in the past, braving the climate, taking the risks, playing his best in the game of life. (Achebe 33)

Allen's call for men to join the colonial administration emphasizes Nigeria's wildness; it is a place that must be subdued, that it will not be closed until it is tamed, and only men who can treat Africans as the proper objects that they are will be successful in Nigeria. There is no room for sentimental attachment to Igbo people for Allen because the very environment that encroaches Nigerian administrative offices is a terrifying "deadly fertility"—this Conradian darkness produces a Manichean dichotomy between good (associated with lightness and controlled reproductivity) and evil (associated with darkness and excessive reproductivity). Christianity in *Arrow of God* participates in this same dichotomous classification where nature represented as a python is evil and civilization is good, but this is also the same logic that governs the development projects in Ireland during the Great Famine because these were motivated partially as a response to the perceived over-reproduction of Catholic peasant families which resulted, from the British perspective, in over-farming the Irish countryside.

Allen's ideas about the environment also gesture toward assumptions about environmental determinism inchoate to scientific discourses of the nineteenth century. This

theory is characterized by the claim that a society's environmental context determines not only the development of material culture, but also the development of the "natural" personality characteristics of that society. These discourses are evidence of a rational epistemology that promulgates "the imperatives of progress, which legitimize the use of social engineering on all those objects defined as backward" (Visvanathan 259). Aside from the emergence of Christianity in Umuaro, Achebe demonstrate the imperative of progress in two ways, both of which encapsulate the idea that Nigeria is a place that must be ordered and contained. The first of these loci is the construction of the road from Okperi to Umuaro and the second is the land claim dispute between these two villages.

The road construction creates an artificial relationship between two communities that would rather remain unconnected. Umuaro and Okperi have historically been rival villages, and the administration intends to connect them with the road in order to better facilitate the movement of people and goods, but because of the tension between the two villages, the road would also more efficiently spread discord rather than peace. Any benefits associated with the road clearly favor Okperi, which "welcomed missionaries and government while Umuaro, on the other hand, has remained backward" (Achebe 36). Ironically, it is Moses Unachukwu, a western educated English speaking Christian Igbo man, who understands that the road and all the different kinds of social relations it forces on the Igbo people in Umuaro and Okperi is actually just another weapon in the British arsenal. When the men of the two competing age groups meet to discuss the ramifications of Wright whipping one of Ezeulu's sons for being late to work, Moses is quick to point out that the road project began because the British Empire wanted to diversify its approaches to suppressing African people:

Yes we are talking about the white man's road. But when the roof and walls of a house fall in, the ceiling is not left standing. The white man, the new religion, the soldiers, the new road—they are all part of the same thing. The white man has a gun, a machet, a bow and carries fire in his mouth. He does not fight with one weapon alone. (Achebe 85)

Moses's analysis here incisively reveals that the road will be an artery of the empire, a way for colonialism, and thus the development mandate, to happen faster and more efficiently—for Moses the road is tantamount to guns and bombs. More importantly, Moses's concerns about the road highlight how the road will be a conduit for the spread of British culture throughout Igboland; the road will facilitate the erasure of Igbo culture.

Moreover, the construction of the road between Okperi and Umuaro further imposes order by eliminating the “deadly fertility” of the forest. Cutting a swath of trees through the rainforest enforces a cognitive map of this imagined Africa and at the same time marks a physical scar on the land. The men use machetes and hoes to cut down trees and clear the land of any roots or stones, and the effect of the cleared area is discomfiting: “The feeling of openness and exposure made [Obika] alert” (Achebe 81). Wright's road transforms the rainforest into an alien space characterized by an openness that opposes the overgrown “deadly fertility” which so concerns George Allen.

This transformation follows a much larger pattern of land acquisition familiar to colonial growth. Lawrence Buell's example of North American westward expansion illustrates the pattern occurring in *Arrow of God* because European settlers discursively constructed the American west as an empty space despite the fact that Native Americans “dwelt there” and subsequently “lost both space and place, until remanded to federally defined spaces” (Buell 64).

Buell's description of place as "thick" and space as "thin" also resonates with the transformation of Umuaro's rainforest (63); by clearing the land of thick vegetation, it contains only the thin air, and further, the emptiness left after the forest is cleared symbolizes that "underlying modernization is a substratum of intolerance"—an intolerance for anything that belies the laboratory state and colonialism's ruse of benevolence, an intolerance that demands "the variegated traditions of the third world...have to be bulldozed into a flat land called modernity" (Visvanathan 280). The cleared forest troubles Achebe not simply because of the ecological ramifications, but because these ecological effects are intimately connected to Igbo spirituality and ways of seeing the world. Destroying the forest also destroys the homes of deities and in some cases, it destroys the deities themselves to make way for modernity that impresses a march to a monocultural civil society.

Achebe's perspective here is ecological in the sense that he perceives the various interconnections between Igbo people and their environment. The way that Igbo people conceptualize the land and ownership of the land is an important part of this epistemological lens, and Achebe offers the dispute between Okperi and Umuaro regarding land as an example of how the competing epistemologies inherent to colonialism are deployed in the negotiation of land claims. Both villages claim possession of a parcel of land that is sometimes used for agriculture or grazing, and in a meeting the Umuaro village elders each give nuanced reasons for supporting or rejecting going to war with Okperi over the land. According to Ezeulu, the land rightfully belongs to Okperi because the people of Umuaro came there as refugees fleeing from Abam: "It was Okperi who gave us a piece of their land to live in [...] If you choose to fight a man for a piece of farmland that belongs to him I shall have no hand in it" (Achebe 15). Nwaka ardently disagrees and offers an alternative history of how the land came into Umuaro's hands:

My father told me...that Okperi people were wanderers. He told me three or four different places where they sojourned for a while and moved on again. They were driven away by Umuofia, then by Abame and Aninta. Would they go today and claim all those sites? Would they have laid claim on our farmland in the days before the white man turned us upside down? (Achebe 16).

Competing claims about Igbo identity characterize Nwaka and Ezeulu's accounts of the land's real ownership. Igbo people in Ezeulu's story are nomads saved from a life of wandering by a paternalistic but generous foreign clan. Nwaka's story reverses these roles and places the Umuaro Igbo in the position of always already having been on the land. These perspectives are a metaphorical condensation of how Igbo people should respond to colonialism—accept the “assistance” of paternal authority or assert one's own claims to authority.

Ezeulu's position tacitly endorses a colonial perspective of how the dispute should be resolved. Winterbottom steps in to adjudicate the conflict before a war breaks out, and he decides that Umuaro's claims to the land must stop because Okperi is the proper owner. Winterbottom's decision is not based on the historical context offered by either Ezeulu or Nwaka, but on the conclusions he can reach about the facts of the case, which is particularly ironic since Winterbottom rails against the establishment of commissions in Nigeria because unlike the French, who are very direct about their imperialism, “We set up a commission to discover all the facts, as though facts mean anything” (Achebe 109). The decision Winterbottom reaches about the land underscores the irony of this statement because he does not fully inquire into the whole context of the conflict. As he tells Clarke, “I went into the question of the ownership of the land which was the remote cause of all the unrest and found without any shade of doubt that it belonged to Okperi” (Achebe 37). From a colonial perspective, the truth

about the situation will emerge as the unimpeded, objective facts are secured through interrogation; Ezeulu is the only person who Winterbottoms thinks actually tells the truth, but the truth Ezeulu tells is the story that Winterbottom is predisposed to hear anyway.

From an Igbo perspective, however, the resolution of the land crisis would not be solved by such an inquiry commission but by the intercession of gods on behalf of the villagers; instead of going to some sort of trial or inquiry, the parties involved in the dispute would swear an oath to their chosen deities in order to prove their trustworthiness (Ubah 98). The practice of asking gods to intercede in property ownership disputes further underscores the differences in epistemological lenses deployed in colonial conflicts—the colonial perspective sees land as an object to parcel out, and though Winterbottom does not mention this, it might regard individuals who have performed “improvements” to the land as the proper owners. The Igbo perspective sees the environment existing on two planes: the material plane and the spiritual plane. When one plane is disrupted, they must appeal to the other in order to rectify the situation.

That the Umuaro villagers are prepared to move beyond intercession to the point of provoking war with Okperi suggests that they have already started to abandon the lifeways that so define their community, and Achebe associates the consequences of abandoning these lifeways with food and food rituals. Perpetual famine and its physical toll on Igbo bodies and Igbo land is only one dimension of the many means by which Ezeulu’s decision to delay the yam harvest disrupts Igbo lifeways. In order to obtain enough food for survival, many in Umuaro elect to buy yams from outside the village in order to supplement their meager stores. This presents a complication because Igbo people in Umuaro are forbidden from eating new yams while there are still old ones about, but they justify this decision, asking, “Who was there to when they were dug out to swear that they were new yams?” (Achebe 219). Buying yams from

outside the Umuaro community not only introduces foreign yams into the village, but it sets up market economy for yams which were previously cultivated by families in their own compounds and for their own consumption.

The famine's consequences go beyond forcing Igbo people to embrace Christianity in order to survive their hunger. What the villagers are left with at the end of *Arrow of God* is a world in which they must restructure almost all social and economic relations in response to the famine. This is devastating to the remaining vestiges of Igbo worldviews. In the end, Achebe's novel opens onto a new story, one in which Igbo ways of seeing the world as an interconnected, spiritual place are entirely replaced by a world subject to western development projects guided by the British laboratory state. Famine in Umuaro makes way for this replacement by allowing Christianity to gain footing with people because they have no choice when faced with the question of survival. The famine's impact renders both physical and social disruptions of Igbo life, and because of this, it can be taken as a metaphor for dying social relations in Umuaro—Igbo people fall away from Ulu, either through their own deaths or through new social relations involving a new God. Though there is not a single moment which brings Achebe's metaphorical rain to Umuaro, it is clear that there is a complex matrix of reasons why the villager gives in to the overwhelming force of British colonialism. But while colonialism plays a substantial role in the disruption of Igbo ways of seeing, Achebe ultimately criticizes Igbo people for their own choices to embrace such a drastically different worldview. Moses speaks a warning to the men gather together after Mr. Wright, the "Destroyer of Compounds" and road overseer, beats one of Ezeulu's sons. He says, "As daylight chases away darkness so will the white man drive away all our customs. I know that as I say it now it passes by your ears, but it will happen. The white man has power which comes from the true God and it burns like fire" (Achebe 85). But while

Europeans might force aspects of development and scientific rationality on Igbo people, it is Achebe's position that Igbo people alone are responsible for their own existence, for maintaining their own ways of being in the world.

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